

obstacles the general had to contend with, from the gross ignorance, ambition, inactivity, and want of principle, in many of their leaders at that epoch, which in fact were the immediate causes of the failure of Mina's enterprise, and of the melancholy termination of his career.

## CHAPTER V.

*Reflections on the state of the Revolution after the dispersion of the Congress—General Don Manuel Mier y Teran—His talent and enterprise—His fall—General Don Guadalupe Victoria—General Osourno—General Don Ignacio Rayón—General Don José Antonio Torres—Degraded state of the Patriots after the latter assumed the command—Reflections thereon.*

WE have already mentioned the dissolution of the Mexican Congress at Tehuacan by General Teran, and the dispersion of its members over the different revolted provinces. Although they subsequently made various attempts to re-establish themselves, yet they never succeeded in forming any civil government, meriting that name. The different military commandants were thus uncontrouled by any civil authority; and hence arose a long and fatal train of disasters to the patriot cause, terminating as might be expected, in a scene of anarchy among themselves, and of triumph to the royalists.

The patriot chiefs who gave the royalists the

most uneasiness and trouble, after the abolition of the Congress, were *Teran*, in the district of Tehuacan; *Victoria*, in the province of Vera Cruz; *Osourno*, in the district of Papantla, in the province of Mexico; and *Rayon*, at the fort of Copero, in the province of Valladolid. There were other chiefs, whose names and operations we shall have occasion to notice; but on the conduct of the four just mentioned, during the year 1816 and the beginning of 1817, rested the fate of the Mexican revolution.

If those four individuals had discarded from their breasts the ambition and jealousy, which unfortunately had become the ruling passions with each of them, then would the patriot cause have triumphed; because the concentration of their forces, and a cordial co-operation in one grand system of action would have enabled them to contend with any army that the royalists could at that time have brought against them.

*Teran* had under his command fifteen hundred men, tolerably well armed and disciplined; *Victoria*, about the same number, well equipped; *Osourno*, about two thousand, principally cavalry, the finest in the kingdom; *Rayon* and his brother had about eighteen hundred, in tolerable discipline. There were, besides, in the mountains of *Misteca*, under the valiant

chief *Guerrero*, at least one thousand good cavalry.

The three first-named chiefs were within *twenty leagues of each other*, and could at any time have formed a junction in *three days*. *Rayon* who was at the greatest distance, could have united his forces with the patriots in the *Baxio*, or great plains of *Guanaxuato*; and menacing Mexico on that side, while the forces under *Teran*, *Victoria*, and *Osourno*, approached the capital on the other, the royalists would have been placed in a situation more alarming than any which had occurred since the beginning of the revolution. The plan just mentioned was the favourite object of *Teran*, who spared no exertions to effect it. The writer has perused the correspondence between *Teran* and the other chiefs, and he does not hesitate to aver, that nothing but the fatal jealousy which they entertained against *Teran*, was the cause of the junction in question not taking place.

In order to shew the precarious situation of the royalists at that time, we have only to recount the great difficulties they experienced in subduing the patriot chiefs, notwithstanding all the disadvantages under which the latter were suffering, from want of arms, and concert in their operations.

General Don Manuel Mier y Teran was a youth of only twenty years of age. He had received the best education which the city of Mexico could give him; was allied to a distinguished family; was modest in his demeanour; of temperate habits; an ardent advocate for the emancipation of his country; generous and brave, with a mind possessing extraordinary strength.

This youth, with a force which on no occasion actually exceeded *fifteen hundred* men, held the city and district of Tehuacan, in the very centre of the Mexican kingdom, bidding defiance to the royal armies, and repelling their attacks, for more than two years.

He built a fort on a high mountain in the vicinity of the city of Tehuacan, and there established his arsenal, a cannon foundry, and a manufactory of powder. Whenever he was pressed by a greatly superior royal army, he retired to his fort, called Cerro Colorado, and baffled all their exertions to dislodge him.

He was particularly attentive in establishing discipline among his troops, and almost daily performed in person the duties of a drill officer. There were no troops during the revolution, of whom the royalists stood so much in awe, as those of Teran's division. Such was their de-

votion to him, that he could lead them to combat against far superior numbers; and when he did not gain the victory, he conducted his retreat with so much skill, as to prevent the royalists from ever causing him much loss.

The city of Tehuacan being situated in the heart of a beautiful wheat country, of course Teran had abundance of provisions. The district is thickly populated, and he could at any time have easily embodied ten thousand men, could he have procured arms for them. The few musquets among his troops were daily diminishing, and in the early part of 1816, he foresaw, that it would be impossible for him to keep his position much longer, unless he could obtain a fresh supply of arms. Frequently has the author heard him exclaim, while his fine black eyes glistened with tears, "*Ah! if I had but six thousand musquets, and three thousand cavalry swords to arm the brave youths that are daily flocking to my standard, I would establish my country's independence, even without the aid of those patriot chiefs, who are now refusing to act in concert with me.*" So great was his anxiety to obtain musquets, that he solicited Victoria and Osourno to co-operate with him in a plan to seize Tampico, or some port to the northward of Vera Cruz, for the purpose of

opening a trade with the United States. But his overtures being sullenly rejected, he boldly determined to proceed through the province of Oaxaca, penetrate to the southward of the province of Vera Cruz, and seize on the port of Guasacualco. It is difficult to convey to the reader a proper idea of the obstacles which Teran had to surmount in this enterprise; but it is certain, that the great object he had in view justified his making the attempt; and it is likewise certain, that his not succeeding in that extraordinary and important project, was owing to accidental circumstances, and not to the valour of his enemies. Having formed this determination, he departed in the month of July, 1816, from Tehuacan. His force consisted of *two hundred and forty infantry, sixty cavalry, and two pieces of artillery, with twenty boxes of ammunition.* He was well aware, that he had to pass through an enemy's country, thickly populated, and that the royalists might bring fifteen hundred or two thousand men to act against him; but he was in hopes, that by making a rapid march, he should in ten or twelve days reach his place of destination, before the enemy could have time to concentrate their forces, or to penetrate his designs.

He had likewise reason to believe, that the

great body of the Indian and Creole population of the province of Oaxaca would rise up in his favour, or at all events would throw no obstacle in his way. He knew that if he once reached Guasacualco, he could take it with ease; and by strengthening its fortifications, he presumed it would be difficult for the enemy afterwards to dislodge him from his position. He had received unequivocal information, that the inhabitants in the vicinity of *Guasacualco* and *Tabasco* were ready to join him. He knew that the people of *Tehuantepec*, on the Pacific Ocean, were ripe for revolt against the Spanish government, and as the distance across the country from Guasacualco to Tehuantepec, was only about forty leagues, he would, by occupying those places, have two important sea-ports; one on the *Mexican Gulf*, and the other on the *Pacific Ocean*. It was his intention, in case he succeeded in taking *Guasacualco*, to have immediately withdrawn his whole force from Tehuacan, and established his head-quarters either on the coast of the gulf, or at Tehuantepec. It therefore appears, that notwithstanding his friends and enemies considered his project, at that time, quixotic and impracticable, yet, when it is examined with deliberation and an unprejudiced eye, it was not merely a plan dic-

tated by necessity, but the wisest under all circumstances, that Teran could have adopted in favour of his country.

The only error of which this enterprising youth can be justly accused, in relation to that expedition is, that he started from Tehuacan in the month of July, instead of June.

The rainy season usually commences in the beginning of July in Oaxaca; in a few days the rivers swell, and the great plain extending along the sea-coast of the province of Vera Cruz, to more than one hundred miles from the ocean, becomes absolutely impassable for an army. Teran was not ignorant of this fact; but when some of his friends told him it was too late in the season to make the attempt, he replied, "That he had known some years when the rains did not set in until the middle of August; that at that moment the whole country was perfectly dry; that he only wanted ten days more of dry weather to reach his intended point; that he was in hopes the God of nature would not defeat his project; that if it was delayed, he could not put it into execution until the next year; and finally, that if he did not succeed, he calculated on being able to return to Tehuacan, before the enemy could take measures to cut off his retreat."

In fact, so determined was he on making the experiment, that all the arguments used to dissuade him from it were unavailing; and accordingly, he left Tehuacan, with the force before mentioned, about the 24th of July.

He met with little opposition during the first five days of his march. He took the towns of *Soyaltepec*, *Isccatlan*, *Oxitlan*, and several other places of considerable importance, some of them containing a population of from five to seven thousand Indians. They received him in the most cordial manner, and hoisted the flag of the Mexican republic wherever he appeared. The different skirmishes he had with some divisions of royal troops, convinced him that he had little to fear from their opposition. He proceeded without interruption to a place called *Tustepec*, about half-way to the place of his destination. His progress was there impeded by a violent rain, which continued without any intermission (except for about two hours each morning) for ten days. Not only was the whole country between Tustepec and Guasacualco inundated, but the greater part of the route he had marched was likewise overflowed; so that even a retreat back to Tehuacan was not practicable at that time. Thus hemmed in at Tustepec, he had to depend on the good offices

of the Indians for provisions for his army. In this he was not disappointed. They gave him ample testimony of their fidelity to the patriot cause, and of their hatred to the royalists. They sent out spies to discover the movements of the enemy, and soon procured Teran information, from the cities of Oaxaca and Vera Cruz, which convinced him that his designs were now known to the royalists, and also that they were making formidable preparations, as well to impede his progress to Guasacualco, as to cut off his return to Tehuacan. Teran was not dismayed by this intelligence, and only regretted that the incessant rains prevented him from moving either to the right or left.

Some intelligent Indians at Tustepec informed him, that if he could reach a place called *Amistan*, about eight leagues distant, he would then get into a road upon which it was practicable to proceed towards Guasacualco, even during the rainy season; but that, to get to *Amistan* at that time, it was necessary to cut a new road. No sooner did Teran receive this suggestion, than he called together the governor and principal Indians of Tustepec, requesting their advice touching the opening of this new road. They represented it to be a difficult task, but offered to afford him all their aid to accom-

plish it. Accordingly, two hundred men of Teran's division, with all the able-bodied Indians of Tustepec, began the undertaking. They completed, in ten days, a road, leading through swamps, which the royalists afterwards acknowledged to be a work that appeared to them impossible to have been executed in less than six months. Teran superintended the whole of the operations; and his indefatigable exertions, united with his ingenuity, excited the admiration of his soldiers, as well as of the Indians. Causeways and floating bridges were thrown over places which before had been considered as entirely impassable; proving what men can accomplish, when urged by necessity, and stimulated by an enterprising leader.

On the 5th of September, he reached *Amistan*, with his whole force. He there learned that the royalists were preparing to attack him, and were actually advancing, with a powerful force, towards Tustepec, under an impression that it was impossible for him to have proceeded any further on his route to Guasacualco. Five leagues from *Amistan* was a royalist post, called *Plaja Vicente*, situated on a river. At this post there was a valuable deposit of cochineal and dry goods, belonging to the merchants of Vera Cruz and Oaxaca, which Teran immedi-

ately resolved to seize upon. On the 6th he reconnoitred the place, and ascertained that the enemy had a force there of about one hundred men. On the 7th he advanced with the division to the bank of the river, immediately opposite to Playa Vicente. On the 8th, in the morning, a canoe came from the opposite side, with two Indians, who informed Teran that the royalists had, the preceding night, precipitately abandoned the village. To ascertain the truth of their report, Teran kept one of the Indians as a hostage, and sent the other, with two of his own soldiers, across the river in the canoe. On their return, they confirmed the intelligence. Some of Teran's officers then volunteered to pass the river, which he imprudently permitted. They came back with such flattering accounts of the immense quantity of dry goods and cochineal, which they had seen in the stores, that the whole division were eager to gain possession of the place. As there was but one small canoe, Teran ordered rafts to be made, to transport the whole of his force across, in the evening, or the next morning.

In the mean time, the canoe had taken over about twenty men; when Teran, fearing that they might commit some excesses among the inhabitants, or indulge too freely in the wines

and brandies which were in the stores, crossed the river, and joined them himself, with three of his officers. He was making the necessary dispositions in the village, by posting sentinels at the doors of the warehouses, and endeavouring to gain the good-will of the inhabitants, when suddenly an Indian, running into the place, gave the alarm that the Gachupins were upon them. Teran was in hopes that it might prove a false alarm; but, with great presence of mind, ordered his little party, consisting of *twenty-three officers and soldiers*, to form, and follow him. They proceeded to that part of the village upon which the royalists were said to be approaching, and there beheld a body of cavalry and infantry descending a hill, within two hundred yards of them.

Teran, at that moment, might have fled to the river; and such of his men as could swim, might have saved themselves. But whether he supposed that the enemy's force was less than it proved to be, or thought that by a display of firmness he should be able to check them until he could receive a reenforcement from the other side of the river, are points upon which we can give no opinion; it is certain, however, that he took post in the rear of a small house, and there gallantly sustained the attack of the enemy.

The royalists appeared several times disposed to retreat: but, seeing that Teran received no reenforcement, and observing at length that the main body was on the other side of the river, they made a bold effort, and broke into the little band. He and two others were so fortunate as to reach the river, which they crossed amidst a shower of bullets, by swimming. All the rest of the party were bayoneted, or taken prisoners.

On the 9th, Teran made his dispositions for transporting his force to the other side of the river, about two hundred paces below the village, with the determination to attack it, and take revenge for the serious misfortune he had encountered. At five o'clock in the afternoon, he issued orders for the division to prepare for embarking on the rafts; his two field-pieces being placed on the largest one, so as to cover the landing. When every thing was ready for the attack on Playa Vicente, it was suddenly suspended, by unexpected intelligence, brought by an Indian from Amistan, that the royalists were within two leagues of that place, and intended to force their march, so as to be able to reach Teran's encampment by day-light next morning.

Teran at once perceived his critical situation,

and knew that if he remained where he then was until the enemy came up, it would animate the royalists in Playa Vicente, and place him between two fires. As soon, therefore, as it was night, he broke up his encampment, and marched about three leagues, until he came to an excellent position for mounting his two field-pieces. He had scarcely time to make preparations for battle, when the approach of a party of cavalry announced that the enemy were near. One of Teran's sentinels hailed them, at the same time discharging his musquet. This was a circumstance totally unexpected to them, as they had been positively assured by spies, that at the close of the preceding day Teran was at the river: however, they conceived it prudent to halt until day-light. In the mean time Teran was improving every minute. He knew that the enemy's force principally consisted of cavalry, and therefore threw obstacles in the road, by cutting down trees, and filling the path with bushes; behind which he placed troops, with the field-pieces, in ambush. We have understood from several royal officers, who subsequently examined the ground, and the arrangements which Teran had made, that it was scarcely credible so much could have been executed, in the short space of four hours, by a division of two hundred and seventy-five men.